

In part 1, I addressed some of the concerns I had regarding Dr. Stone's rejection of Total Depravity, praise of freewill, distortions of Calvinism, and other pelagian leanings found in his article, "Calvinism: It's not just irrational. It's atheism". The next quote from his article displays the great abhorrence he has for Calvinism. It makes you wonder how—if his conclusions are correct—he can reasonably concede that Calvinists are Christians at all.

"I submit that free will is *axiomatic* to human existence. We live each day, moment by moment, just as if we are persons. But if this is quite meaningless, that man is constrained at every point by Calvinist-defined sovereignty, then you and I are not persons. Consequently, the One in whose image we are made, is no person either. If man doesn't exist as a person, then neither does God, and God as a person doesn't exist. This is atheism, except that atheists are not such blasphemers as to credit God with the moral evils that plague our world."

So again, Calvinists are essentially blasphemous atheists because they do not hold to Dr. Stone's unbiblical view of freewill. To reiterate a bit from part 1, it is perfectly logical to assert that people do make actual choices, but it is also perfectly logical to assert that their choices are governed by their nature. The real issue here is that fallen man will never seek after the God of Scripture, repent and believe the gospel unless God graciously gives them a new nature. Any relative good the natural man does is irrelevant to this discussion. Man does what he wants to do. But what fallen man wants to do cannot be separated from his fallen nature, his nature being at enmity with God.

So, Adam's fallen progeny act accordingly, that is, suppressing the truth in unrighteousness and not freely and willingly seeking after the things of God. This teaching does not equate to atheistic/mechanistic determinism, and it certainly does not substantiate the charge of blasphemy.

Dr. Stone goes on to say that the Calvinist depends on "Calvinistic sovereignty" because, due to "unconditional damnation" (his phrase; addressed in part 1), sovereignty must exist to prevent the individual from seeking after God since, of course, it would be a real letdown for one to seek after God and believe the gospel only to find that he has been "unconditionally damned" from eternity past. He writes:

"It's not a big leap, by the way, from Unconditional Damnation to Calvinist sovereignty. Otherwise, what if a non-elect fellow gets curious about salvation and seeks God? ...John 6:37b teaches, '... him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.' That fellow could get

saved if he decides to come to Christ. And so the Calvinist needs his version of sovereignty to prevent that!"

The biblical data obtained from a proper exegesis of John 6 seem to be lost on Dr. Stone. He clearly ignores the fact that no one of their own accord will seek after God—"There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God" (Romans 3:11)—so his concern for lost sheep haphazardly seeking after the Shepherd is unfounded. Calvinism does not teach that God executes sovereignty in order to hold back the "unconditionally damned" who might otherwise "choose to repent...choose to believe...humble themselves, recognize their lost condition, turn from sin, and turn to Christ". Such an idea implies that man's natural inclination is *toward* God, rather than *away* from Him. Obviously, God would have no need of doing this because all men's hearts are by nature set against Him in the first place. Furthermore, the atonement was made for God's elect people in the covenant of redemption. The cross-work of Christ secured the salvation of those same people who have been "born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:13). Those, and only those, will come to Christ. God's sovereignty does not need to suppress their wills against coming to Him, for opposing Christ is their natural inclination. So, those for whom Christ died will receive the entirety of salvation, including regeneration, faith and repentance.

"If you're not a Calvinist and fairly new to this 'debate,' you might think I'm making all this up. It's too ridiculous to even warrant consideration. Yet Calvinism is gradually taking over most of evangelicalism, and much of fundamentalism is infected with portions of the heresy. The Calvinist insists he believes in God. Perhaps, then, he's closer to pantheism than atheism, per se.... Calvinists tend to see such blatant contradictions as predestination vs. free will as mysteries, not wanting to admit the gross illogic. The mystic can always invoke mysteries when his religion doesn't make sense.

"...The fact that such nonsense can propagate so readily within Christendom, including among born again Christians, is evidence of the *spectacularly* free will we enjoy. As I suggested before, God doesn't save us from willful stupidity."

With a foundation of mischaracterizations in place, Dr. Stone goes on to employ his "freewill" in executing abusive *ad hominem* attacks. Thus Calvinism is both "too ridiculous to even warrant consideration" and "heresy" (later he adds "poison" and "insanity"), and Calvinists are atheistic, illogical, stupid mystics. I think it is now clear why I didn't receive much of a response from Dr. Stone after he read my discourse on "freewill". He goes on:

"I'm teasing the Calvinist reader by choosing 6:37b. Part 'a' of that verse refers to the eleven disciples, which should make many passages much clearer to the Calvinist who is willing to examine Scripture freely, without the blindfold of TULIP."

It is unclear what point Dr. Stone is trying to make here. As anyone familiar with debates surrounding Calvinism could attest, the broader context of this passage from John chapter six is a logical stronghold for the doctrine of predestination. Dr. Stone makes no attempt at exegesis here but only makes a passing reference to the phrase, "him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out". He is apparently using this as a counter-measure to the strawmen of "Unconditional Damnation" and what might be termed 'Suppressive Sovereignty'. (There you go, I just coined a phrase for Dr. Stone's view of sovereignty—that which prevents unbelievers from freely choosing God. Dr. Stone, feel free to use this term in identifying your strawmen if you like).

I am curious which caricature of Calvinism is correct. On the one hand, Dr. Stone says that according to "Unconditional Damnation" and Suppressive Sovereignty, God prevents those fine truth-seeking folk from ever finding Christ. But on the other hand, he says that Calvinism teaches that God directly controls the movement of every atom, even our thoughts, so that "we mechanically play our parts". But if this mechanistic view of the universe were true there would be no point in the charade about God stepping in to prevent autonomous man from believing the gospel. Pick a caricature and go with it. These strawmen are not getting along well.

Despite the pelagian tendencies in some of Dr. Stone's argumentation, he does rightly go on to point out the corruption of man's heart. He writes:

"False doctrine derives from corruption in the heart, not misunderstanding in the mind. Consider a well-known passage, Jeremiah 17:9-10. 'The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.'

"The 'heart' is the center of man's being, as represented in Scripture, your controller, the part of you that weighs the alternatives and says, "That's what I want to do." A man's heart is corrupted by sin - transgressions of God's laws - coupled with man's flesh . . . his natural inclinations...."

He is right that the man's heart is corrupted by sin, and this affects his natural inclinations.

But somehow this is used to prove that man's corrupt heart causes some to embrace Calvinism (that, or, an obsession with "pseudo-intellectualism"). Apparently though, man's heart is yet not so corrupt that it would prevent him from making choices contrary to his nature, such as believing the gospel.

Stone's passing over of the implications of Jeremiah 17:9 depend in part on the popular notion of a 'head-heart distinction'. Perhaps this allows him to separate the inward corruption of the heart from the autonomous and free will of man. I do not believe the heart and mind are two separate and distinct entities. Consider a very small sample of Gordon Clark on this point:

"...*heart* is a Scriptural expression for mind. It does not mean emotions.... If anyone would take a few moments and look up every instance of this word in the Old Testament, he would find that about seventy-five percent of the time it means mind. The remaining one-fourth of instances are divided between the will and the emotions. Strictly the word *heart*, it seems to me, means 'the whole personality.' And the proportion shows that the mind is the most important factor in the whole personality." [1]

To conclude, Dr. Stone has downplayed the effects of the Fall, separated the will from the rest of man (the will being somehow insulated from man's intrinsic fallenness), set up a blatant strawman with regards to Unconditional Election (by fabricating a parallel "Unconditional Damnation"), likened "Calvinistic sovereignty" to mechanistic determinism, atheism, and Islam, and made other various lesser errors in his assault on Calvinism.

I can relate to his sentiments. I was quite opposed to Calvinism for years and would latch onto any argument that seemed to quench the fiery darts of the Reformed ones. I was influenced by some of the same material that it appears he has drawn from. I do not expect him to become convinced of the reformed soteriological order by reading my short response, but as Dr. Stone says himself, *Truth Really Matters*. It is out of love for the Truth that I am compelled to call out some of his erroneous contortions of Calvinism and contend for a God-centered, monergistic theology of redemption.

-Nick Sabato

[1] Clark, G.H., *What is the Christian Life?* The Trinity Foundation, Unicoi, TN, 2012, pp. 189-190.

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